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SAN DIEGO LODGE, NO. 35.

A HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION FROM ITS BIRTH.

When and by Whom Founded – Some Reminiscences of the Master of the Lodge – The Brethren Who Meet Upon the Square.

Nearly Forty years ago the first lodge of Free and Accepted Masons in Southern California received its dispensation. This lodge has been and is now borne upon the register of the Grand Lodge as San Diego Lodge, No. 35.

The dispensation by which it was first authorized to meet was issued by Bro. D. B. Hyam, then Deputy Grand Master, and bears date August 1, A. D. 1851, A. L. 5851, and the first meeting held under it appears to have been on the 20th of November following. Why the brethren did not sooner avail themselves of the privilege granted by this instrument does not appear. At that time, however, the communication between San Francisco and San Diego was not so easy or speedy as now, and it may have been delayed; at all events the meeting of that date is the first of which we have any record.

The minutes of that meeting are duly recorded in a plain half paper bound, five quire book of rather rough paper, and bears on the fly leaf the inscription, "Presented to San Diego Lodge, F. and A. M. by Hawley, Sterling & Co., San Francisco, February 18, 1852." The gift at this time would not appear to be very munificent, but then, we may doubtless suppose, was of considerable value, as not only stationary, but all other commodities and necessities of life on the Pacific Coast commanded prices which to us now are almost fabulous. But the gift was duly appreciated, as the lodge afterwards returned a vote of thanks for the same and the names of the generous donors have been thereby handed down to us of a later generation.

An extract from the minutes of that meeting may be of interest. They read as follows – we quote verbatim; "Brethren present, Wm. C. Ferrell, W. M.; John Judson Ames, S. W.; Daniel

Barbee, J. W.; R. E. Raymond, Treasurer; A. Herasthy, Secretary; Wm. H. Moon, Tyler. Visiting brethren, Lewis Rose. Lodge opened in the Masters' degree. The W. M. presented a dispensation from the Worshipful B. D. Hyam, Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the State of California, of Free and Accepted Masons, granting a dispensation to Brothers William C. Ferrell, John Judson Ames, Daniel Barbee, John Cook, William H. Davis, J. W. Robinson, R. E. Raymond, and others (who the others are is not stated), whereof he appointed Brothers William C. Ferrell, W. M.; John Judson Ames, S. W., and John Cook, J. W., to hold a lodge of such in the City of San Diego, and dated at San Francisco, August 1, A. D. 1851, A. L. 5851, and countersigned by Brother L. Stowell, Grand Secretary, under seal of the Grand Lodge, which was read by the secretary of the lodge for the information of the brethren present."

At that meeting petitions were presented from Messrs. George F. Hooper and J. B. Magruder, "praying for the arts and mysteries of Ancient Free Masonry." The former petition was referred to a committee; the latter "ordered on file," after which nothing further appears to have been done with it. We may remark in passing that the J. B. Magruder here referred to was the after celebrated Gen. John B. Magruder of the Confederate army; he was then stationed here and in command of this military post; the George F. Hooper referred to was afterwards President of the First National Gold Bank established in San Francisco and now resides in Sonoma. After the petitions were received "no further business appearing, Master Masons' Lodge closed and Fellow Craft Masons' Lodge opened; no business appearing, Fellow Craft Masons' Lodge closed and Entered Apprentice Masons' Lodge opened and no business appearing, Fellow Craft (E. A. ?) Masons' Lodge closed in harmony."

The meetings of the lodge after that appear to have been held somewhat irregularly, as we see the next meeting of record was held January 8, 1852; the next march 11th, and so on; sometimes following each other in quick succession, at others at intervals of more than a month. Nothing of any particular moment, however, seems to have occurred unless it be that at the meeting of March 25th notice was received from California Lodge No. 1 of the rejection of the widely known if not notorious Judge E. (Ned) McGowen; also of Samuel Brannon. The mention of the former name will recall to the mind of many an old Californian, the stormy days of the Vigilance committee of San Francisco.

After a meeting held in April an entry is made in the Record book as follows: "The foregoing records were examined by me, May 11, 1852, B. D. Hyam, Grand Master," but no criticism or comment made. It may be inferred however that the foregoing records hardly came up to the standard, as at a meeting held June

7th, a communication was read from the Grand Master pointing out certain errors, etc.

The brethren about that time were evidently dissatisfied with the lodge room, as at the same meeting a committee was appointed to procure a more suitable place. This committee subsequently reported "that the house now occupied as a court house can be made a suitable hall," which report was afterwards concurred in, and the committee directed to procure the room at the court house. Thus the halls of justice and of Free Masonry for once at least, were one and the same; no unfitting or incongruous alliance.

The brethren duly celebrated the natal day of St. John the Baptist, during that the first year of their existence as a lodge, and afterwards for fourth day of November of the same year being the centennial anniversary of the initiation of our illustrious brother, George Washington. The last celebration was in compliance with a resolution passed at a special Grand Communication of the Grand Lodge held August 17, 1852, in which it was recommended to the subordinate lodges to observe that anniversary. The brethren of San Diego seem at that time and for years thereafter to have been of a very decided social inclination. They almost invariable, year after year, celebrated the anniversary of St. John, the Baptist, or as one of the secretaries of the lodge gravely writes it, "St. John, the Babstist." Had he so written it but once it might have been supposed only a lapsus pena, but he writes it so repeatedly, and thus persistently insists that the Saint is the "Babstist." How he ever got such an ingenious [...] on the good saint's name can hardly be imagined. We presume, however that with his title, as his anniversary was so continuously and enthusiastically observed by the brethren of San Diego Lodge.

After the brethren got into their new quarters at the Court House nothing of special importance seems to have marked the even tenor of their way although their meetings, as we have said, were not very regular. From the 28th of December 1852 to the 7th of March 1853, but one meeting was held of which we have record. At that meeting a visitor was received whose name has since become known wherever the English language is spoken. It was Brother George H. Derby, who, as the record informs us, was a "Past Master of Sonoma Lodge, California, and being invited by Brother Wm. C. Ferrell, W. M. presided at the meeting." Bro. Derby will be far better remembered by his pseudonym of "John Phoenix" than his true name. His contributions to the early literature of the Pacific Coast as preserved in "Phoenixiana" are rich and racy, winning for him a national reputation as an humorist. This, we believe, was about the time he came near getting himself court martialed for a suggestion made to the War Department in regard to a change in the uniform of the common soldier. By this change he proposed that each man of the rank and

file was to have a hook attached to a strong iron plate firmly affixed to the dome of his pants – behind. The suggestion was seemingly made with the greatest seriousness and accompanied with drawings illustrating how they hook could be made useful in carrying the soldier's knapsack; in “yanking” him back into the ranks in case he tried to escape, or in dressing the line, and in hanging him up for the night when he went into camp. Jefferson Davis, who has but so recently gone to join the great silent majority, was at that time Secretary of War, and could not, for a time at least, see “where the fun came in,” and was determined on court martialing our humorous and genial brother, but was finally dissuaded there from by the representations that if treated so seriously it would make the Department the laughing stock of the world. Happily thus Brother Derby escaped.

At a regular meeting held April 13th, he, Brother Derby, petitioned the Lodge for affiliation, and so on the 23rd of that month was duly elected. Up to, and including this date, the Lodge had been acting under dispensation, that instrument having been continued from time to time from the 1st day of August, 1851 – a period of nearly two years – but at the last named meeting which was, as we are informed, “a meeting of immergency grown out the fact that this Lodge cannot transact it business in time for the next meeting of the Grand Lodge,” a series of resolutions were passed, the substance of which was, that Brother George H. Derby being about to visit San Francisco, was then and thereby appointed a proxy for the W. M. and Wardens, with powers plenipotentiary and extraordinary, to represent the Lodge; “to explain fully and frankly all the proceedings of the Lodge;” to ask for a charter and pledging it, “as a Lodge and as Masons individually and collectively to cheerfully and fully conform in future to all the rules and regulations of the Grand Lodge and the principle of Free Masonry to the best of our ability.”

Before Brother Derby could proceed on his mission, however, the time for the next regular meeting came round and was duly held “Thursday, April –, 1853,” Brother Derby acting as W. M. pro tem, and, as the minutes show, ‘the steamer Ohio not having arrived so Brother Derby could not leave. * * * * *

We are now unexpectedly enabled to hold this regular meeting,” and another resolution was adopted reading as follows: “That this Lodge approve and adopt the proceedings of the last special meeting as a part and parcel of the proceedings of this regular meeting.” The former proceedings of the “meeting of immergency” being thus made a “part and parcel of this regular meeting,” he would be captious indeed who could doubt the entire regularity of the whole course of procedure.

Brother Derby's mission was successful. So will be seen by reference to the proceedings of the Grand Lodge at its regular Grand Communication, held in May, A. L., 5853, “a charter was

ordered and Brother George H. Derby was admitted to a seat as the representative of that (San Diego) Lodge.” The charter bears date “the sixth day of May, A. D., 1853, A. L., 5853 * * according to the old constitution revived by his Royal Highness, Prince Edwin of York, in the Kingdom of England, in the year of the Christian Era, nine hundred, twenty and six, and in the year of Masonry, four thousand, twenty and six.” It names James W. Robinson as Master, Philip Croswaite as S. W. and William H. Moon as J. W., bearing at the top the names of Charles M. Radcliffe, Grand Master; J. G. Candee, D. G. M., pro tem; William D. Fald, S. G. W. pro tem; and R. F. Knott, J. G. W., and is signed by George H. Derby, Grand Treasurer, pro tem, and L. Stowell, Grand Secretary. It authorizes the Lodge “to be held in the town of San Diego, California, San Diego County, or with in five miles of the same,” which last provision played an important part in its history, as will be seen hereafter.

The meeting above referred to as held Thursday, April –, 1853, is the last of which we have any record until the 28th of July following when in Brother Derby’s hand writing is entered the minutes of a regular meeting of that date; but on the page preceding he makes the following note: “Minutes between May 1st and July 28th not to be found. G. H. Derby, Secretary, San Diego, August 15, 1853.” We are thus left in ignorance as to how the Lodge was dedicated or constituted and its entire proceedings during that interim. After the entry of the minutes of July 28th follows another short note, viz: “The following proceedings were entered in a small book that I have copied into this. Thos. R. Darnell Secretary,” but when this note was made does not appear. Brother Darnell starts in to copy from “a small book” but gets no further with his copying than the heading, and names of some of the officers present at one meeting, when the copying ceases, never to be resumed. This is the last entry made in the gift of Messrs. Hawley, Sterling & Co. The paper of that book is, as we have said, a little rough, and the proceedings recorded in it seem sometimes not to be quite so smooth as they might have been; so it is possible the W. M. ordered the whole to be – filed.

Afterwards, from August 14, 1853, to October 1, 1860, the records were kept in “a small book” – we suppose the one referred to by Brother Darnell – the size of its pages being about four by seven inches. We further suppose this small book was of Brother Derby’s selection, as the first entry in it is in his handwriting, and at that meeting he was elected Secretary. He notes in the minutes a communication received from Bro. W. H. Moon “to the effect that he (Bro. M) did not consider himself a member of this Lodge.” (Yet Brother Moon was named in this charter as the first Junior Warden.) The Lodge thereupon proceeded to hold an election “with the following result: Brother Lewis Rose, J. W.; Brother G. H. Derby, S.; Brother John Hayes, Treas.” After which “Brother

Derby, delegated by the Grand Lodge for that purpose, proceeded to install the following officers: Brother Croswaite, S. W.; Rose, J. W.; Derby, S.; Hayes, T.; Hoof, S. D.; Goldman, J. D." The W. M. elect seems not to have been present to be installed, and how Brother Derby proceeded to install himself we do not know; but if any man could do that thing, we would bet Brother Derby could, and "get there all the same."

From that time to the succeeding November the minutes are kept in the delicate and neat hand of Bro. Derby, and if "brevity is the soul of wit," he certainly possessed wit, as well as humor, to an eminent degree. Frequently the proceedings of a meeting are condensed to but little more than the half of a page of the "small book." In all of those meetings, held from August 15th to November 13th, he acted not only as Secretary but as Master pro tem. At the annual election held December 26th he was re-elected Secretary, but afterwards declined to serve, and Bro. D. B. Hoffman was appointed. For some time after that Bro. Derby continued a member of the Lodge, but finally demitted, and like officers of the army generally we suppose was transferred from place to place until his death.

If it be true that, "happy is the nation which has no history," perhaps it is equally as true in regard to Masonic lodges, and San Diego Lodge would be no exception. For years it moved on at even pace, with little beyond the ordinary business to mark its existence. Initiating, passing and raising good men and true; dispensing that charity which is one of the greatest ends of the Fraternity; observing quite regularly the feast days of the Masonic calendar, or perhaps kindly and lovingly laying to rest, in that long sleep that knows no waking, some loved brother, its days and nights were passed; and months and years rolled on.

At length, however, a disagreement arose which for a little time interrupted that peace and harmony which is one of the marked characteristics of the craft. Differences but seldom, we are happy to say, arise among Masons, but Masons are but men and men being but human, differences will occasionally arise even among those of the mystic tie.

To explain this disagreement we must go back a score of years.

In 1867 the land upon which is now centered the great part of the wealth and population of the present flourishing city of San Diego was but a waste. In May of that year our now venerable Brother A. E. Horton purchased it, paying for it the price of 26 cents per acre and proceeded to lay out in blocks and lots, "Horton's addition." Until that time the settlements on the Bay of San Diego had been what is now called Old Town or Old San Diego, and where the Jesuit Fathers established their first mission on the Pacific Coast. To the west of it about two miles on the north side of the bay had grown up the little village of La Playa, whole to

the south of it, distant about four miles, on the east side of the bay and around its curve, had been laid out some lots, sparsely settled, and then, and now called "New Town." "Horton's addition" was laid out still further to the south and east and adjoining New Town. After Father Horton had laid out his addition its superior advantages of locality soon attracted attention; it commenced growing apace, and before long had a greater population than Old Town, La Playa and New Town combined. The Lodge, when first instituted was located and for years afterwards, remained at Old Town or Old San Diego. At length Horton's addition had quite a large number of the Free and Accepted within its limits and they were compelled to travel a distance of between three and four miles to avail themselves of the privilege of attending lodge meetings. Feeling this something of a hardship they wished to institute a new lodge nearer home; but this they could not do without the recommendation of the nearest chartered Lodge, which of course was San Diego, and from it they could not obtain a recommendation by which they could procure a dispensation. Matters remained in this unsatisfactory condition about a year, when at last one fine evening in April, 1870, the brethren of Horton's addition mustered in force and moved in a body on Old San Diego, and on motion it was resolved to move the Lodge from its then location to Fifth Street in Horton's addition. Under the old form of charter to which we have called attention the Lodge was authorized to meet "in the town of San Diego or within five miles of it," and consequently, while the brethren of Horton's addition thus stole a march on the brethren of Old Town, their action was perfectly regular and the Old Towners had to submit. The action for a long time caused a good deal of hard feelings on the part of the old pioneers. Gradually, however, this feeling abated and now but little or nothing of it remains, peace and harmony again prevailing.

Since its removal, the Lodge has grown with the growth of the city and strengthened with its strength, until now it has a membership of nearly 200 and is still growing as rapidly as is consistent with the health and permanent prosperity of Masonic Lodges. It has one of the most beautiful halls on the coast, as its place of meeting and is well provided with the "furniture, ornaments, lights and jewels" of all well regulated lodges.

Brother Addison Morgan, presided ably over its counsels this past year, aided and assisted by Brothers Eli T. Blackmer and John K. Blackmer, as Senior and Junior Warden, while Brothers John H. Simpson and Kenneth J. Ware have for years acted as its Treasurer and Secretary. This coming year, Brother Eli T. Blackmer will preside in the East, Brother John K. Blackmer, look well to the West, and Brother William J. Mossholder adorn the South; the Treasurer and Secretary remaining the same.

Thus we close the history of San Diego Lodge, No. 35. it will, perchance, interest many as “old timer,” of “the days of old, in the days of gold,” who will remember it as the first Masonic Lodge in Southern California. Nearly isolated as it was for long years, it was a sort of law unto itself, as appears from its first records. The brethren of that early day while they seem to have been eminently of a social turn and to have discussed in the language of their minutes many “a sumptuous dinner,” when yearly they assembled, yet we see by the same records, they forgot not the higher and nobler duties of charity. Thousands of dollars were paid out by them in quiet, unostentatious benevolence, and many a sick and destitute brother, weary and world worn, has had reason at their hands to bless “The Compass and the Square.”

A few words as to Masonry generally in San Diego, and we close an already, perhaps, too lengthy article. There is in the city not only the Lodge of which we have been writing, but also a Commandery of Knights Templar, a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons; a Lodge of Perfection of the Scottish Rite, and a Chapter of the Eastern Star, all meeting in the same hall, and all flourishing healthfully and prosperously. In addition to these a new Lodge was instituted last Summer under the name of Silver Gate. It was called to order for the first time under its dispensation on the 31st day of July last, having been instituted not only with the consent, but with the cordial cooperation, aid and assistance of San Diego Lodge. Its first officers were David E. Baily, Master; Alonzo E. Dodson, Senior Warden; James Wells, Junior Warden; James S. Clark, Treasurer, and John A. Fish, Secretary. At the communication of the Grand Lodge held in October last, it obtained its charter bearing date, October 10, A. D. 1889, A. L. 5889. Bros. Baily, Dodson and Wells being named therein as Master, Senior and Junior Wardens, and on the 30th day of October was duly constituted and its officers installed in the presence of a large assemblage of the craft, and is now known upon the registry of the Grand Lodge as Silver Gate Lodge, No. 296. At its first annual election but recently held, all of the officers above named were elected for the ensuing Masonic year.

We hope for it a happy, useful and prosperous continuance in the galaxy of lodges in this grand jurisdiction, and that its Silver Gate will always be open to the worthy, and never closed to the unfortunate, the destitute or the distressed.

San Diego, December, 1889.

D. E. B.
